

Postcards from Iraq Winning hearts, minds...

My tour in Diyala Province (2005-2006) and the one just completed in Baghdad (2007-2008) have both been overwhelmingly memorable. In each deployment, it was the people I had met, observed and worked with that I will forever remember. I am reminded of our United States history when I state that you all—Soldiers, civilians and Iraqis (Sunni, Shia, Kurd, Christian)—are an *awesome* group of individuals much like our forefathers.

In 1775, we Americans were disparate groups of English, Irish, Germans, Italians, Protestants, Catholics, Jews, etc...charting an unknown course but believing in *unity* there was *strength*. So 232 years later, here we find ourselves going through another historical experience helping other “disparate” groups trying to follow our footsteps to become what our forefathers described back then as, “*We the People... establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general...*” (Preamble to the United States Constitution, 1775)

As volunteers in this historic reconstruction mission in Iraq, you all have worked *together* with many courageous Iraqis to help so many others in this war-torn country. You and your families have unselfishly shown that in the years to come, the Iraqi people’s desire for freedom and prosperity can become a reality.

Another more recent similarity comes to mind. Back in the 1920’s, “Tammany Hall” was a euphemism applied by the press for the Irish immigrants who ran New York City. For many Italian immigrants (my grandfather being one) coming to America to work, Little Italy in the heart of New York City was their first stop. There they met with the benevolent “Godfather.” His role was to help the Irish pols find good immigrants with skills to build the city into what it has become today.

When I recently visited projects in the Baghdad Al Doura neighborhood (or *Mahalla 840*) with Capt. Cooke, I saw many Iraqi men, young and old, come up to him and pay their respects. I couldn’t help but think of the stories my Grandfather told me of his experience during the “roaring 20’s” and what that part of south Baghdad will one day become because of Capt. Cooke’s efforts to the win hearts and minds.

Walking down the main Street # 25 of M840 in January 2008 with our Soldiers was all I needed to appreciate the difference since my first trip back in March 2007. Back then, it wasn’t even safe to get out of the Humvee much less walk the empty main street. Where 250,000 people lived there wasn’t a soul to be seen. Now, to see the children interacting with our Soldiers and the Iraqi adults chatting with Capt. Cooke as if he were the “godfather” of M840 was an overwhelming sight to behold. Similarly, not many folks back in 1775 gave our forefathers or their families much hope that they could ever make this thing called “*freedom of, by and for the people*” work, but like them, you persevere in finding ways to make freedom for the Iraqi people become a reality. I am profoundly honored to know and have rubbed shoulders with such a group and will forever be humbled by the



(Left) Army Capt. Cooke wins hearts and minds in a Baghdad Mahalla, or neighborhood.

efforts of just a relatively few good men and women helping the Iraqi people accomplish extraordinary things under sometimes brutal and oftentimes difficult circumstances.

Finally, there is no “blue book” or roadmap for our men and women to follow here, just as there wasn’t any for our forefathers. Their determination and perseverance against all odds (and naysayers) made their hunger for freedom happen. So when one considers what it must have like for our forefathers and compares it to what the Capt. Cooke’s of our military and our civilians have accomplished in less than 5 years, one can only come to the realization that our men and women, under these brutal circumstances, have done a profoundly successful job. We can all take a great deal of pride from that.

The message you send throughout the world is loud and clear. It is about patriotism, honor and selfless service to the noble cause of helping others, as it was written long ago, “*Do unto others as I have done unto you.*” (Luke 6:30-36)

Thank you all for your unselfish service and for giving this 40+ years former combat engineer (1964-1966) one last chance to help you make footprints in the sand and “*...go where there is no path and leave a trail.*” (Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1802-1882).

To all my Iraqi colleagues and friends, in Spanish, French, Arabic and “Doc” I say, “*Hola, Essayons, and In sha’ Allah, together da da dah*” (translated— Hello my friends, let us try and God willing, *together* we will succeed) ...words spoken from the heart transcend all language barriers, *Capisce?*

LOL .

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